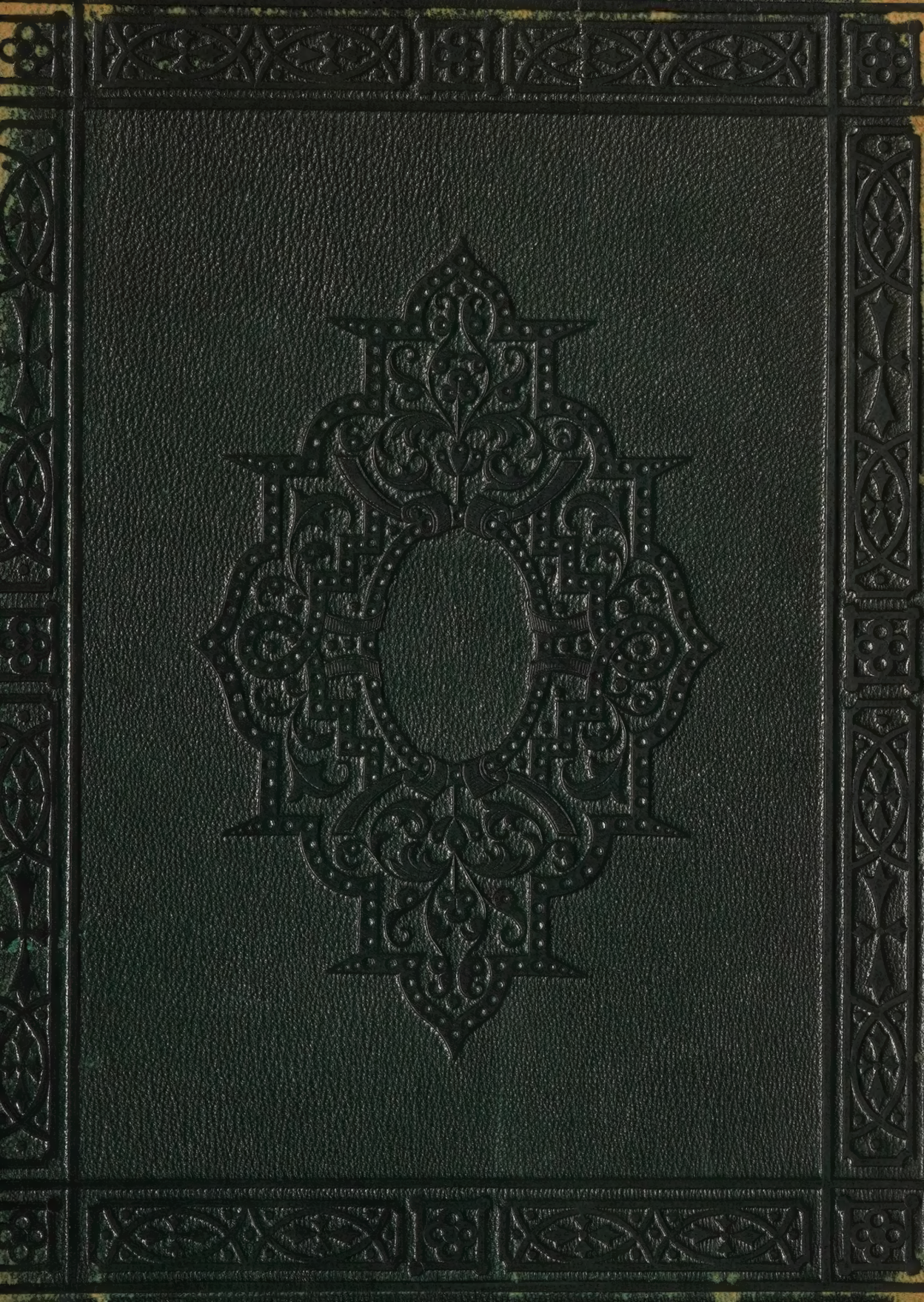
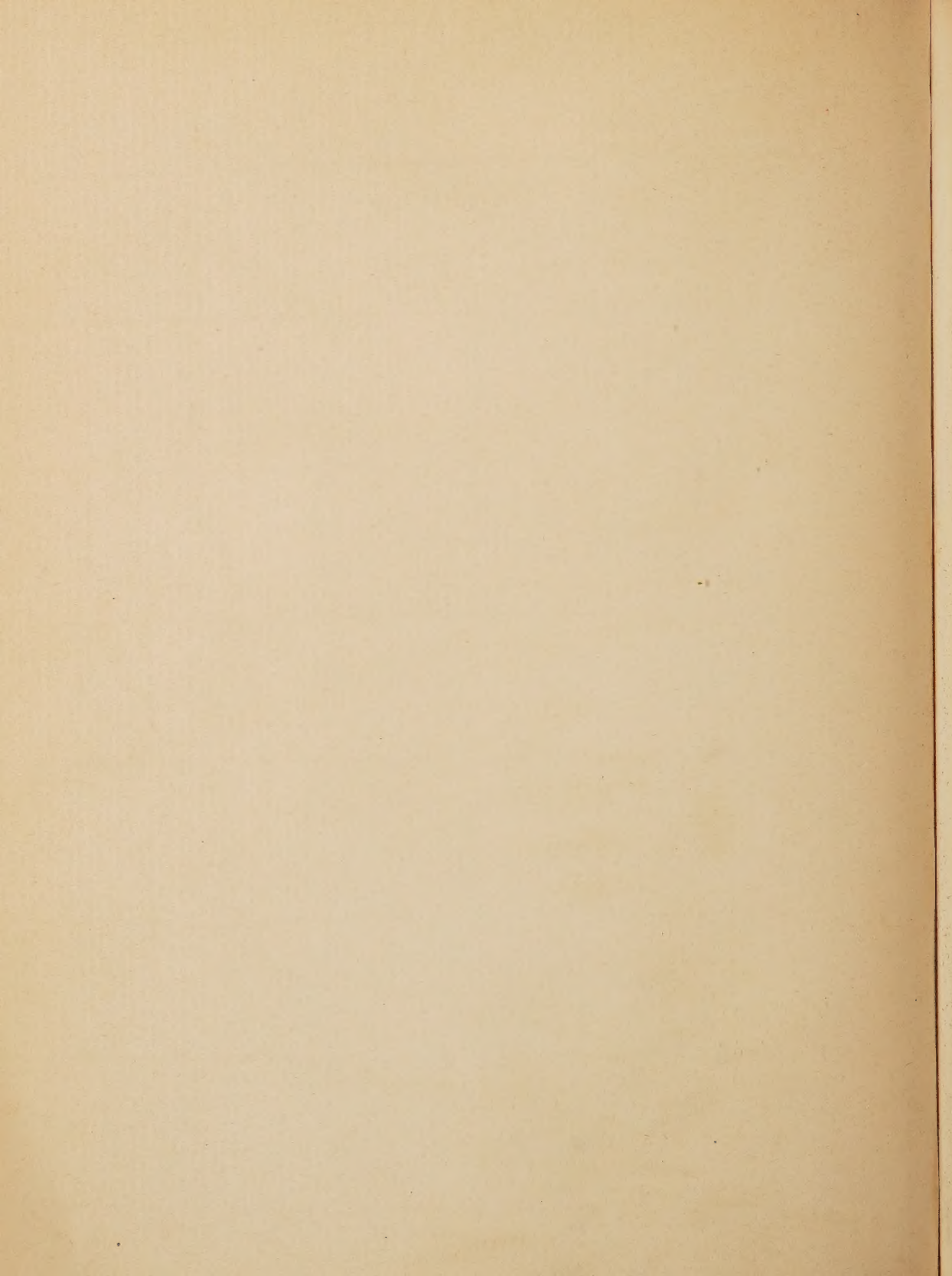












W. E. Fette.

Jan 1. 1866.

Presented by Sidney W. Burgess.

PICTURES OF ENGLISH LANDSCAPE.

1862

BIRKET FOSTER'S

PICTURES OF

ENGLISH LANDSCAPE.

(ENGRAVED BY THE BROTHERS DALZIEL)

WITH

PICTURES IN WORDS

BY

TOM TAYLOR.

BOSTON:

J. E. TLLTON AND CO.



PREFACE.

It is fair that the public should be informed of the relation of the designer and the writer who have contributed to this volume.

Birket Foster's drawings were made quite independently of the verses I have attempted to set to them. I am therefore the more free to express, in the first place, my admiration of the singular grace, fertility and facility of invention, felicitous arrangement of line, and harmonious distribution of light and shadow which distinguish the compositions of this charming artist.

The verses which I have associated with his designs are meant to harmonize with and illustrate, without pretending to describe, the inventions of the painter. In this free way, I believe, pen and pencil will be found to work best together. The painter, as a rule, succeeds as ill in painting after the writer's descriptions, as the writer who tries to produce a picture in words after the painter. But picture may be set to poem, or poem to picture, as music is set to words, with an effect that enhances the enjoyment both of one and the other. I have attempted such a setting of poems to Mr. Foster's pictures;—with what success the public must determine.

The poems of "The Smithy," and "At the Brookside," are my wife's, with whom I was anxious to be connected in the first serious original poems to which I have attached my name.

It may be worth mentioning—I do not know if Mr. Foster is aware of the circumstance—that he and I are, if not precisely fellow-townsmen, near neighbours in our birth-places. We must have been familiar in our earlier years with the same nature on the sea-coast of Durham and Northumberland. But as he has not, in this series of designs, laid his early impressions under contribution,—except perhaps in two designs, "The Mill," and "The Farm-yard,"—so I have drawn upon my later experiences of the South of England for my illustrations. Still I believe

PREFACE.

we are the better fitted for such an association as the present by our having played among the same fields and deans, and breathed the same keen air of the Northern sea. I believe that I can trace in much of Mr. Foster's work the influence of this Northern nature, though his singular amenity and gracefulness of design, both in landscape and figures, may seem, at first sight, to savour little of the rude North. He has, indeed, both in his drawings and in his designs for the Wood Engraver, carried suavity and grace to the very highest point to which they can be carried without falling into effeminacy, as he has pushed delicacy of execution to a pitch beyond which it seems impossible to go without pettiness and loss of unity. It is one of the mysteries of Mr. Foster's art how he manages to conciliate such finish with such breadth of effect.

In this series of designs Mr. Foster has been, I think, exceptionally fortunate in his Engravers. The Brothers Dalziel have devoted to the reproduction of his drawings an amount of labour very seldom bestowed on wood-blocks, with an aim at combined freedom and force of effect which gives their work much of the character and charm of etching.

It is still a moot point among the best critics of art how far Wood Engraving can profitably be carried;—whether it can attempt, with success, such freedom, and subtlety of workmanship as are employed, for example, on the skies throughout this series,—or should restrict itself to simpler effects, and a broader and plainer manner of execution.

Whichever opinion be the sounder one, those who claim for Wood Engraving the widest variety of means and the greatest power of attainment, have never, I think, been supported by such strong evidence in their favour as this series supplies.

The Designs should have the more interest for the public as they are the last works for Wood Engraving likely to be produced by the artist.

TOM TAYLOR.

LAVENDER SWEEP,

WANDSWORTH,

July, 1862.

CONTENTS.

THE GREEN LANE	1
DONKEYS ON THE HEATH	2
THE MILL	3
THE LITTLE ANGLERS	4
THE GLEANERS AT THE STILE	5
THE OLD CHAIR-MENDER AT THE COTTAGE DOOR	6
THE FARM-YARD	7
THE HAY-FIELD	8
THE REAPERS	9
BUILDING THE HAY-RICK	10
THE COUNTRY INN	11
THE SMITHY	12
THE WATERING-PLACE	13
COWS IN THE POOL	14
THE MARKET-CART	15



CONTENTS.

THE WOOD-WAIN	16
A WINTER PIECE	17
OLD COTTAGES	18
AT THE COTTAGE DOOR	19
AT THE BROOK-SIDE	20
FOUR STAGES OF THE STREAM—	
I. THE DIPPING-PLACE	21
II. THE STEPPING-STONES	22
III. THE LOCK	23
IV. THE MILL	24
UNDER THE MOON-BEAMS	25
AT SUN-SET	26
THE VILLAGE CHURCH	27
THE FERRY-BOAT	28
THE COTTAGE ON THE BEACH	29
AT SEA AND ON SHORE	30





THE GREEN LANE.

THE highway lengths of dust and stone
Lie grey in blinding heat;
For throbbing heads no shadow thrown,
No turf for weary feet.

I tempt the worn wayfarer's tread—
Green portals arching wide,
Green grass below, green leaves o'erhead,
Green banks on either side,

Topped by the purple oaken pales,
—Park-bounds for miles away,—
Clasped here by ivy's clinging trails,
There dim with lichens grey.

O'er darks which my leaf-shadows weave
With glints of golden sun,
Shy rabbits frisk at morn and eve,
And stealthy pheasants run.

I've nuts and berries for the young,
I've shelter for the old,
Snatch of sweet grass for sheep that pass
By me, 'twixt field and fold.

No cot, whose smoke curls blue and cool
Where my elm-branches wave,
But I have ta'en its babes to school,
Its elders to the grave.





II.

DONKEYS ON THE HEATH.

WANDERING thralls of wandering master,
Hobbled, harness-galled and rough,
Round the gnarléd thorn we pasture,
Picking scanty fare and tough.

What to us are wind and weather.
Who ask no man's pains or pity?
Better toil through gorse and heather
Than through shrill and stifling city.

Better wood-smoke sharp and fragrant
Than the alley's odours foul;
Better serve a merry vagrant
Than bear coster's stripe and scowl.

Like our gipsy lords, disdaining
City comfort, city care,
Leave us, rough but uncomplaining,
To our scanty moorland fare.



III.

THE MILL.

BLACK and weather-warped and old,
Looking o'er the windy wold,
Gaunt and grim and rearing high
Its ragged sails against the sky,
For many a year hath stood the mill;
Hath heard the plover's eager cry,
Hath seen the blue cloud-shadows fly
Across the heath, athwart the hill.
Births and deaths, with lives between,
Of many a miller, it hath seen;
Many a pair of stones worn out,
Many a set of gearing stout,
But change of fashion, time and tide,
The ancient mill hath still defied.
In its place upon the hill—
Sweeping sails or standing still—
Emblem of enduring will.
Serving with a constant mind,
Though it serve the inconstant wind.



IV.

THE LITTLE ANGLERS.

SWIFTLY sped the summer-day,
By the beck's brown shallows,
Swiftly in their whirling play
Flashed the summer swallows,
Dipping wings and then away,
In and out the golden shallows.

Fragrant bean and clover flowers
The warm winds seemed to winnow,
For perfume of the golden hours
When we fished the minnow.

Darker now the summer skies,
Summer hours seem shorter,
Summer breezes seem to rise
From a chillier quarter,
As for goldfish we throw flies,
Greybeards in more troubled water.

Hemlock rank and thistle hoar,
The cold winds seem to winnow,
And bear no more the scent they bore
When we fished the minnow.



THE GLEANERS AT THE STILE.

By paths that ran through spikéd sheaves,
 Or stubbles russet green,
 Girt with their belt of living leaves,
 I strolled to sketch the scene.

Gold framed in emerald! hedge-row bound,
 New-reaped or wheat-clad square,
 And purple fallow, to the round
 Of woodland-distance fair.

Foot-ways that wound through corn-flowers blue,
 Red poppies, nodding wheat,
 To brakes, where, light in shadow, grew
 The stately meadow-sweet.

A group of gleaners came in sight,
 Resting about a stile;
 Unseen, I marked their dark and light,
 They talking free the while.

Their talk ran on their harvest-spoil,
 The bushels gleaned and shelled;
 Each boasting how her childish toil
 The household store had swelled.

The meadow-sweet breathed fragrantly,
 The elms swung overhead,
 But what of beauty spoke to me,
 To them spoke, first, of bread.

Thenceforth the sweetness of the scene
 Methought, more solemn grew,
 With threads of human toil and teen
 Enwoven through and through.



THE OLD CHAIR MENDER

AT THE COTTAGE DOOR.

Look, lasses, look! draw close about,
 Though there ain't much for wonder;
 I puts 'em in, and draws 'em out,
 And then I plaits 'em under.
 None of your rotten rush-dryers,
 Or second-rate cane-splitters;
 The chairs I mend will see to end
 More than one set o' sitters.

It's queer how people come to trades,
 Or how trades come to people;
 You'd say I'd no more call to chairs
 Than yon cow to a steeple.
 A six-foot tent's where I was born,
 And a six-foot tent I pair in,
 With no room for a three-legged stool,
 Much more a high-back'd chair in.

There's many ways house-dwellers have
 That I can find excuse for,
 But chairs, where there's the wholesome ground,
 I ne'er could see the use for.
 Still, all things for some good are sent,
 Best known to Him that sends 'em,
 And I conclude that chairs were meant
 To find folks bread that mends 'em.



VII.

THE FARM-YARD.

THE farm-yard of my boyhood! is it truth
That farm-yards were more pleasant then than now?
Or is't the golden morning-light of youth
My memories with a glory doth endow?
I see the farm-yard of my boyhood still,
Its aspect facing to the sheep-fed hill;
The thick leaf-piles that swayed with murmurous sound,
Bee-haunted limes, elms where rooks wheeled and watched,
Above the roofs, green-mossed and russet-thatched,
That on grey posts the fold-yard shaded round:
The open cart-shed—shed and gate in one;
The pigs and heifers basking in the sun,
About the leg-deep litter, trod to paste
In the brown runnings careless let to waste:
The ragged rails, the faggot-pile beyond;
The hoof-poached edge of the green-mantled pond,
Its marge and surface with white feathers dotted;
The high-ridged barn with orange lichen spotted;
Rude plenty everywhere, if somewhat slattern,
That seemed akin to Nature's liberal ways,
All alien from the trim right-angled pattern
That science fits her farms to now-a-days.
'Twas doubtless ignorance such farms that planned,
And knowledge, doubtless, sweeps them from the land,
But leave me, ignorant, still to enjoy
The rude farm-yard I loved so when a boy.



VIII.

THE HAY FIELD.

WHEN, white and wet, the morning dew
Clung close on swathe and spray,
Our rakes, I know not how, still drew
Together in the hay.

And when the sun rode hot and high,
As at noon-tide we ate,
Though there were prettier girls than I,
'Twas still our hands that met.

And when they heaped the latest wain
Upon the sun-set lea,
I raked for him, and he was fain
Still to fork after me.

And when my sister's child I took
Down to the flag-fringed weir,
The water-lilies from the brook
He still would land-wards steer.

And though apart we labour now,
And though our place lies wide,
Home and afield, I know not how,
Our paths come side by side.



IX.

THE REAPERS.

SILVER in the sunshine,
And golden in the shade,
The corn stands ripe for shearer's gripe,
And shearer's sickle-blade ;
The ears that waved at morning,
At eve shall low be laid.

Onward press the shearers,
The bandsters come behind ;
The sickle clears the waving ears,
The hands are quick to bind,
For the ripening of the sunshine,
And the drying of the wind.

Gay at morn the poppies
Showed their scarlet dye ;
With withered leaves, among the sheaves,
At night the poppies lie ;
For beauty is but earthly,
And loosed from earth must die.

Humbly grew the wheat-ears
In their russet weed,
Now ripe and dry in sheaves they lie,
To help poor human need ;
For good from earth when severed,
Most serves for food and seed.



BUILDING THE HAY-RICK.

HAPPY, hot, hay-making time,
Heart of the glad summer's prime,
When even labour seems in tune,
For once, with joys of balmy June;
When freely flows the farmer's beer,
And toil shakes hands with lusty cheer,
While from crisp and clean-raked swarth
Of the meadow to the garth
The heavy hay-piled wains roll in,
Where with song and bantering din,
Stamping feet press down the mow,
Behind the tall elms' windy row,
Till all the air for miles away
Breathes of fresh and fragrant hay.
With slack reins the sweating team
In the rick's broad'ning shadow steam;
While unchecked hands before them spill
The new-mown hay in careless heap,
And field-born cans the ale-cups fill,
And those who toil for once may reap
Of the abundance that has birth
From God's glad and generous earth.



THE COUNTRY INN.

" Good entertainment for man and horse,"
Says the Red Lion swung from the old oak-tree ;
A promise that whoso tests may endorse ;
For home-brewed ale, sheets clean, if coarse,
And bacon and eggs in last resource,
Have drawn better men than you or me,
Where the Red Lion swings from the old oak-tree.

There's a brimming water-trough, cool and clear,
Where the Red Lion swings from the old oak-tree ;
And a crib of sweet hay standing near,
That the resting driver, over his beer,
May watch his team, with loosened gear,
Enjoying themselves as much as he,
Where the Red Lion swings from the old oak-tree.

The time has been, e'er railways began,
When the Red Lion swung from a stout oak-tree,
That whereso highway or byway ran,
Such hostelries greeted the wayfaring man
To a well-filled trencher and well-frothed can,
And all were welcome as welcome could be
Where the Red Lion swung from the stout oak-tree.

But now we are ruled by the iron-ways,
Where no Red Lion swings from its tree ;
At the Station Hotel the traveller stays,
And few are the pence and scanty the praise
That come to the landlord of other days,
All bare and bowed as the scathed limbs be
Where the Red Lion swings from the old oak-tree.



THE SMITHY.

EARLY in the summer morning,
 While 'tis fresh and cool,
 Ere the village clock gives warning
 Of the hour for school,
 Satchel-bearing groups are gathered
 Round the smithy shed,
 Peeping where the great horse tethered,
 Waits until his shoes are sped;
 And the merry blacksmith plies
 His sturdy strength to wondering eyes,
 Ringing, ringing, bravely ringing,
 Up and down his hammer swinging,
 Fiery jets about him flinging.

There at noon the maiden lingers,
 There, perchance, will stop—
 While their needle-work her fingers
 All unheeding drop;
 So she lingers and she watches
 Sparks each other chase,
 Till a cheery glance she catches
 From a swart and smiling face.
 Loving thoughts the hammer lighten,
 Loving looks the smithy brighten,
 As the anvil ringing, ringing,
 Answers to the hammer's swinging,
 Fiery jets about it flinging.

There at pleasant hours of even,
 Sober, cool, and grey,
 When the church-clock striking seven,
 Gives the green to play,
 White-haired gossipers are gathered
 Round the smithy door,
 Where no waiting horse is tethered,
 And the anvil's clink is o'er;
 Cooled the forge's fitful heat,
 Hushed the hammer's measured beat,
 All day ringing, bravely ringing,
 To the sturdy forger's swinging,
 Fiery jets about him flinging.



THE WATERING-PLACE.

Under skies of tropic heat,
 Over sands that scorch the feet,
 By dry beds of parched-up streams,
 How many an Englishman may be
 Wrapped even now in pleasant dreams
 Of English coolth and greenery !
 How many a head, that tossing prest
 A hot and fever-fretted pillow,
 May find surcease of its unrest
 In visions of cool-shadowing willow,
 That with its fresh green boughs doth look
 In the mirror of the brook,
 Where it broadens to a bay,
 Letting the currents go their way,
 And lying dark and glassy-still
 As a pool above a mill,
 Save when stirred by red-webbed oar
 Of sultan drake who puts from shore,
 And proud his painted harem lends
 To their seraglio in the reeds ;
 Or when at eye the weary team
 With loosened traces seek the stream,
 And, eager their parched throats to cool,
 Drive widening circles o'er the pool.
 Above the sleeper's head the punkah swings,
 The dreamer sees the waving of the willows ;
 Outside, the jackal yelps, the cicada rings,
 The dreamer hears the brooklet's tiny billows
 Over the gravelled shallows playing,
 The sedge and rush and burdock swaying,
 And tinkling in the shiny pebbles
 Ah me, dream fancies ! kindly rebels,
 'Gainst waking facts, that from above
 Come down, of life's dead weights relieving,
 Why are you so quickly wove,
 Or so quick in the unweaving ?



COWS IN THE POOL.

MIGHT I choose, with Æsop's bent,
Aptest type of self-content,
It should be a herd of cows,
Who when heat forbids to browse,
And when midges sting and tease,
In dry shadow of the trees,
Seek a still and sheltered pool,
Rush-begirt, and dark and cool,
And in knee-deep bath sedate,
Flick off flies and ruminate
On the fever and the fret
Of silly sheep whose hearts are set
On pasture in the sun's hot glare,
Or on the foolish flights in air
Of the swallows flashing by,
Now to stream and now to sky.
Do-nothing philosophers,
Whom nor midge stings, nor gad-fly stirs ;
Who in serene contempt look down
On toilers in the world's fierce day,
Or on the flighty spirits frown,
That spend in fancy's flash and play
The hours you ruminate away
In tepid water and soft clay.



THE MARKET-CART.

Our farm's six miles from market-town,—
 Three miles of high-banked lane,
 And three across as steep a down
 As e'er set team astrain.

But I'd not change that rough six mile
 For the smoothest six I know,
 For there's a face and there's a smile,
 That when that road they go—
 Our mare's a slug, but all the while
 I wish her twice as slow.

On Saturdays so light a heart
 As mine was ne'er on farm;
 I help her to our market-cart,
 And wrap her soft and warm.
 To look at her once made me sad,
 Though hopes and hearts are free,
 For I am but the farmer's lad,
 And the farmer's daughter she;
 But of my service now she's glad,
 And she's said as much to me.

Our lane runs deep a pleasant mile,
 Through hedge-rows close and high;
 What lips may do, but talk and smile,
 Who knows but she and I.
 The fox-glove from the brake may leap,
 To whisper the bright blue-bell;
 The poppy out of the corn may peep,
 'Twill blush, but never tell;
 If the ox-eyes saw, they'll the secret keep,
 They love her face so well.

My dog he'll herd a score of ewes,
 Each foot from farm to town;
 I'm at her side, I touch her clothes,
 Sometimes I lift her down.
 Oh! glad are sky-larks when they sing,
 And glad are lambs that play,
 And glad is young green corn in Spring,
 And hawthorn-boughs in May,
 But earth holds ne'er so glad a thing
 As me on market-day.



THE WOOD-WAIN.

QTORN a stout oak of a hundred,
 To a slim beech of three-score,
 " Our boles are marked to be felled and barked,
 Thine, mine, and many more.
 I saw the wood-bailiff of late go by,
 And he eyed us both with a cruel eye.
 In hedge-row and copse the axe's stroke
 I hear, and the shuddering crash,
 That tells of the death of brother-oak,
 Or sister-bee chand ash ;
 So bid good-bye to earth and sky,
 From roots low down to limbs on high,
 Our time is come, and we must die ! "

See bared of bark, pale trunks and stark,
 The tallest and fairest grown,
 Their broad limbs lopped, their proud heads topped,
 Upon the dead cart thrown.
 As it rolls along the grassy ride,
 With oaks and beeches on either side,
 The naked trunks they quake and quiver,
 Where on the wain they lie,
 The living trees they shake and shiver,
 As the dead trees are borne by ;
 And the wheels and axles groan and gride,
 For they were trees, felled in their pride,
 And they grieve for the trunks above them tied.

But Nature's beauty and use and care,
 Are all unlike to Man's ;
 Out of her trees, so free and fair,
 His planks and beams he plans,
 Till, what with axe and saw and plane,
 Naught's left of tree, except the grain.
 So we, trees in the woodman's hand,
 Who planted and may fell,
 Must yield to him both trunk and limb
 To mould, as likes him well.
 But, spite of axe and saw and plane,
 Smooth planks or rough, we still retain
 The central lines of the native grain.



A WINTER PIECE.

Frost in the air, till every spray
Stands diamond-set with rime,
That drops a while at mid of day,
With tiny tinkling chime.
Beside the ice the ducks a-dose,
Dream of the pools to be ;
The sheep for warmth lie huddled close
Upon the naked lea.

The grey sky's flecked with wan white gleams,
And wan and white below,
On laden trees, and locked-up streams,
And roof and road—the snow ;
All silent shrinks the feathered throng
That cheered spring-wood and wold :
Only the robin pipes his song,
The cheerier for the cold.

Dear household bird, whose gladsome strain,
Beside the window-sill,
Sounds like reproof of hearts too fain
To freeze in winter's chill !
It sings " This bare bough once was green,
And green again will be ;
Where winter is, I've summer seen,
And summer yet shall see."



OLD COTTAGES.

THE cottage-homes of England! Yes, I know,
 How picturesque their moss and weather-stain,
 Their golden thatch, whose squared eaves shadows throw
 On white-washed wall and deep-sunk latticed pane;
 Their massive chimney stacks, against the dark
 Of overhanging boughs, elm, ash, or lime,
 Here weathered white, there red as cedar-bark
 In sun; their walls all warped and wrung with time;
 The well-worn step that from the threshold goes
 Down to brown Rembrandt depths of lighted gloom,
 Where the thick-leaded lattice scarcely shows
 The nooks and corners of the shadowy room:
 The guelder-roses, snow on emerald-green,
 The ivy twining o'er grey post and pale,
 The white-starred jessamine, whose fragrant screen
 Clothes the rough walls and scents the passing gale;
 The bee-skeps, and their busy buzzing swarm
 Laden with honey from the bean-rows deep,
 The grey field-path, that to the upland farm
 Winds o'er the lea, dotted with feeding sheep;
 The kindly nature that still masks decay
 With flowers, and hues only less fair than flowers,
 All these I know,—know, too, the plagues that prey
 On those who dwell in these bepainted bowers:
 The foul miasma of their crowded rooms,
 Unaired, unlit, with green damp moulded o'er,
 The fever that each autumn deals its dooms
 From the rank ditch that stagnates by the door;
 And then I wish the picturesqueness less,
 And welcome the utilitarian hand
 That from such foulness plucks its masquing dress,
 And bids the well-aired, well-drained cottage stand,
 All bare of weather-stain, right-angled true,
 By sketchers shunned, but shunned by fevers too.



AT THE COTTAGE DOOR.

SING out, my thrush, for all thy cage ;

I too am caged like thee,

But narrow bounds, I dare engage,

Will never sadden me.

The bees that far a-field are fain

Their honey-quest to drive,

When evening comes rejoice again

To seek their queen and hive.

The vine that climbs above our heads,

The wilder shoots it throws,

The thinner is the shade it spreads,

The sourer grapes it grows.

So sing, my thrush, a happy thrall,

And I will sing with thee,

For narrow bounds are best for all,

And home's enough for me.



AT THE BROOKSIDE.

How many a happy summer-day
 We sisters spent beside the brook,
 Where fox-glove spire, and ox-eyes gay,
 Light up the shady coppice nook.
 To the waters, chiding, chattering,
 There we listened hand in hand,
 Started at the chesnuts pattering
 From the startled squirrel's hand.

The fox-glove bells we loved to tie
 To verdant spray of oak or beech,
 And in the brook that glided by,
 Flung them as far as arm could reach.
 And we watched their course unsteady,
 Floating, struggling, hurrying on,
 Now in current, now in eddy,
 Catching now on root or stone.

For maiden tongues of love will talk,
 And all their fancies turn on love;
 And when we pulled the tender stalk,
 And fox-glove bells about it wove,
 And flung it in the tiny torrent,
 "This he, and this is I," we cried,
 "As fares each branch by wind and current,
 To each shall weal or woe betide."

There still the bubbling brooklet flows,
 And still the fox-glove blossoms high,
 And still the tender star-wort grows,
 By hanging cowslips pale and shy.
 But sister-hands apart are riven
 Far from the borders of the stream,
 And fate has different answers given
 To that, our maiden morning-dream.

L. W. T.



FOUR STAGES OF THE STREAM.

I. THE DIPPING-PLACE.

FROM its spring-head, below the hill,
Through clustering docks and reeds,
It wound scarce seen, an infant rill,
Untaxed for human needs.

And other baby runnels ran
To join with it in play,
Till many rills in one, began
The streamlet's working day.

Beneath its alder-shadows cool
Cows made their summer lair,
And shepherds dammed it to a pool
To wash their fleeces fair.

Then by elm-bosom'd cottage-pales,
Where the green coltsfoot grows,
And lilies spread their golden sails,
For household use it flows.

The swallows from the broad-thatched eaves
Brush it with winnowing wing,
And to its edge, through lush green leaves
Lasses their pitchers bring.



XXII.

II. THE STEPPING-STONES.

STILL broad'ning on with every rood,
None may the brook o'erleap,
Even when innocent of flood
Its summer shallows sleep.

Answ'ring the whispers of the beech
With whispered ripple-tones,
From wavelets that scarce mid-way reach
The sun-warmed stepping-stones.

Too shallow, if it willed, to drown,
The babes that cross its play;
Too clear to hide one pebble strown
Along its harmless way.

Ah, youth of man, and youth of stream!
Who dreams, while smooth and clear
The summer-shallowed waters gleam,
The winter spate so near?

When every rounded stepping-stone
Where babies fearless stood,
To fierce desire a barrier grown,
Serves but to chafe the flood.



XXIII.

III. THE LOCK.

AND now a river, charged with freight,
And glassing in its flood,
Town, tower, and bridge, and willowy ait
Where the swan rears her brood,

And towing-paths that passage ope
On either reedy marge,
And teams that strain against the rope
Of the low-laden barge.

Till the broad lasher bars the stream,
Set thick with eel-pots brown,
Where the white waters chafe and ream,
And fling them frantic down.

That drawn off sideways, smooth and still,
The pent-up flood may go
To where the lock doth fall and fill,
With gate-checked ebb and flow.

Like subtle counsel, that supplies
A safe and side-long way,
To round whatever barriers rise
Across the forth-right way.



XXIV.

IV. THE MILL.

SINCE to a stream the rillels ran,
The streams to river grew,
Vilest or noblest work of man,
The water's set to do.

Till smirched with labour-stains impure,
To 'scape the town 'tis fain,
And between flower-fringed banks secure,
Runs itself clear again.

But at its purest never proud,
'Tis glad to labour still,
Where through the willows clattering loud,
You hear the busy mill.

How stilly, ere its work's begun,
Above the wheel it sleeps;
How blithely, when its work is done,
Below the wheel it leaps.

But still, as sorry to proceed,
Eddies and eddies near,
And decks with wealth of water-weed
The willow-shaded weir.



UNDER THE MOON-BEAMS.

MAGIC of light! but now I strayed,
Under a cope of darkling sky,
Whereon the gaunt oak's tracery
Seemed but a blacker shade on shade.

Sullen among the sougning reeds
The pitchy marish-waters slept,
And through the hair a horror crept,
As of a place for nameless deeds.

When sudden from a drift of cloud
Burst the moon's disc, with arrowy light
Flooding the edges of the night,
Like silver fringes on a shroud.

Across the face of the black pool
Rippled in smiles the gladsome beam,
And searched the shade with level gleam,
And ousted Horror's midnight rule.

I thought of darkling souls, whose night
Is lit with sudden burst of love
And hope, irradiant from above,
How all their blackness turns to light.



AT SUN-SET.

THE sun sinks in yon western sea of gold,
Among the isles of amethyst fringed with fire,
Against whose glory, purple clear and cold
Stand gable roof, and elm and poplar spire.

Their image, at this still hour, stilly sleeps
Within the pool, unstirred save where the fling
Of rising dace, or swallow's dipping wing,
Drives a slow shiver o'er its golden deeps.

It is the hour when from Italian shrines
Ave-Maria bells call knees to prayer;
What need of bells? This hushed and rosy air,
That awful west, which like God's portal shines,

This sun, that only sinks to rise again,
Might heav'n-ward draw us in our pause of toil,
Could but hard hearts cleanse them of sinful soil
As hard hands wash them clear of labour's stain.



THE VILLAGE CHURCH-YARD.

NARROW the bounds of village life and death :
 The infant's cradle, and the elder's grave
 So near, it seems that those who sleep beneath,
 And those who play where churchyard grasses wave,
 Must almost breathe alike the lime's sweet breath,
 And hear the daws clamour round tower and nave.

The city churchyard is a ghastly place,
 High heaped in festering mould, with nettles rank
 That clutch and choke in venomous embrace
 The tombstones fall'n awry, and greening dank ;
 Girt by mean houses grudging its foul space,
 And walls that bulge from its o'erladen flank.

Far other is the village vale of rest,
 With its green leaves, and mounds, and tomb-stones grey,
 Nibbled by grazing sheep, or lightly prest
 By feet of happy schoolboys in their play ;
 The Sunday place for youth to greet and jest,
 And age to bask and muse on life's decay.

Such should God's-acre be. From the lych-gate
 I hear the bees about their fragrant toil
 Among the limes : round the dim dial-plate
 Of the grey tower the daws keep up their coil :
 From the near yew a thrush pipes to his mate—
 Nought but sweet sights, scents, sounds, and rest from life's turmoil.



THE FERRY-BOAT.

(Night Thoughts in an Australian Stock-man's Hut.)

A RIVER ran between us—my early love and me—
 And well I loved the old ferry-punt that gave us passage free ;
 How eagerly I watched it from the far bank labouring o'er,
 For the ferryman was old and stiff, and strong the current bore :
 But when I leaped aboard the punt the passage was not long,
 With a good ash-pole in a lover's hand—a lover young and strong ;
 Still I see her by the river, beside the landing-place,
 With the arbeles all a shiver, and their shade upon her face.

But now there lies between us—my early love and me—
 Six feet of churchyard mould, and four thousand miles of sea :
 I am a grizzled stock-man, here on the Murray plains,
 And the grave of her I love is green with England's soft spring rains.
 Sometimes upon the Murray's side, under the blue gum's shade,
 I think I see the old ferry-punt, with her nose in the rushes laid,
 But when I look about me the fancy fades away,
 The wattles stand where the Dutch elms stood, and a blue sky for a grey.

At night by the stock-hut fire, with no children round my knee,
 I think of the life we hoped to live, before I crossed the sea ;
 And I'm glad the time draws near that will join our hearts again,
 In the land the good book tells of, where no parting is nor pain ;
 That quicker than that ferry-punt from bank to bank shot o'er,
 Will bring me where she's waiting upon the further shore ;
 Where I shall see her standing beside the landing-place,
 With a wondrous light about her, and no shade upon her face.



THE COTTAGE ON THE BEACH.

THROUGH the red corn-fields to the sheep-fed downs,
Athwart the rounded downs, by the deep chine,
Whose trees slope from the sea their wind-shorn crowns,
And inland lean, as sickening of the brine,

You reach, below the scarp of the chalk hills,
A sea-cot, with the tide hard at its door,
And the blown sand white on its window-sills,
And smell and smack of sea from roof to floor;

As if some stranded hull to house had grown,
And might up-anchor still, and float away,
When highest spring-tides to its doorway blown
Should call it seaward, in salt gusts of spray.

Heaps of sea-gear lie round : a boat-roofed shed ;
Quaint wicker-traps, and ropes sea-bleached, and floats
Bordering pitch-brown nets, clean sails outspread,
And idle oars resting on idle boats.

Its babes have made their playmate of the sea
That kisses their brown feet, and on the shore,
Her jetsam of strange shells and weeds spreads free,
Binding their young hearts to her more and more ;

Till when brown babe to browner man hath grown,
Of his old play-fellow he has no fear,
Though Siren-like to death she draw him down,
And sing exultant songs above his bier.



AT SEA AND ON SHORE.

" Now a blessing on the moonlight,"
 Prayed one who lone and long
 By a watchful lamp at midnight
 Had crooned a cradle song.
 Below the cliff-perched cottage
 The surf-beat rose and fell,
 As baby's breath and mother's song,
 Went with its sink and swell.

" For in yon silvery shimmer
 That falls across the sea,
 I see his boat-sails glimmer,
 And I know he thinks of me."

" Now a blessing on the lamplight,"
 Prayed one who watched the line
 Of float on float, from a sailing boat
 That tracked the mackerel's shine.
 Beneath the yawl's black quarter
 The sea-thud went and came,
 And ebon fell her shadow
 On the moon's white wake of flame.

" For in yon lamplight, fleeting
 And faint although it be,
 A wife's and baby's greeting
 Reach to me o'er the sea."



